Communication Matters

Postsecondary Deaf/HH Services Regional Roundtable

Wednesday, March 8, 2006
9 am - 3:30 pm
Mott Community College
Flint Michigan

The Regional Roundtable will provide resources to disbability service providers, interpreters, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and related professionals. There is no cost to attend, but you must register. See the end of this Communication Matters for the flyer and registration form.

Here Hear 2006 Conference and Expo

For people with hearing loss and service providers.

April 28,29, 2006
Crowne Plaza Hotel,
Grand Rapids

www.mi-shhh.org

EXCERPTS FROM THE CSAVR

VRS/VRI WHITE PAPER

The CSAVR Committee on Services to Individuals Who Are Deaf, DeafBLind, Hard of Hearing, & Late Deafened released a White Paper on VRS/VRI in January, 2006. Below are excerpts of the document that may be of most interest to vocational rehabilitation professionals. Sections that are not included in this excerpt are noted below. If you would like a copy of the complete White Paper, please contact Julie Eckhardt: jewel@chartermi.net *or 231/922-2943.*

Introduction

No one would argue that modern technology has completely changed the way that business and government manage and deliver services. E-mail and fax messages provide instant, permanent records of transactions and decisions; tools such as PowerPoint and Adobe Reader allow for creative presentations and documents; and videoconferencing is providing effective, real-time communication among employees, consumers, and clients. For Deaf consumers, it is video-based interpreting technology that has suddenly provided an alternative system for communication with their vocational rehabilitation counselors and others.

> "Just as "PC" (personal computer) entered our daily jargon 15 years ago and "IM" (instant messaging) entered it 5 years ago, so, too, will VRS and VRI become daily abbreviations we use without giving them a second thought."

Videoconferencing technology is designed to provide real-time communication between two or more users when distances separate them. Large corporations and universities regularly use the technology now for purposes such as meetings that would have previously required long travel periods for their employees. For the Deaf consumer, video interpreting provides even more, i.e., access to real-time communication in their native signed language, thereby removing linguistic and cultural barriers and providing equitable access to the hearing world.

Thus, it would seem that video interpreting could be a 'magic pill' capable of not only solving the costly issues of time and travel for vocational rehabilitation staff, but also allowing for more deaf-friendly communication. However, before any agency chooses to pursue this technology as a means of providing services for Deaf

consumers, a thorough review of the possible technology and services, as well as the obvious and hidden advantages and disadvantages, is necessary.

Terms and Definitions

As with any new technology system, an understanding of its common terms, definitions, and phrases is needed. The most common terms and concepts related to Video Interpreting-based services are:

Video Relay Service (VRS): A telecommunications relay service that allows people with hearing or speech disabilities who use sign language to communicate with voice telephone users through video equipment. The video link allows the Interpreter (also known as a Communication Assistant (CA) or Video Interpreter (VI) to view and interpret the party's signed conversation and relay the conversation back and forth with a voice caller. (RID Video Interpreting Ad hoc Committee, July 05) The VRS is an Internet-based service that connects the Deaf consumer to an interpreter via a web cam or videophone. However, the hearing person does not see either the Deaf consumer or the interpreter and needs no special equipment other than a regular telephone.

"Video interpreting should now be considered as the mechanism that can and will provide a larger and more effective array of services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers, while quite possibly saving money. Thus, vocational rehabilitation agencies should consider purchase and use of this technology."

Currently, under FCC regulations, VRS is free to the consumer for telephone communication. The FCC also mandates that interpreters must to be qualified.

Video Remote Interpreting (VRI): Is provided between two parties who may or may not be located in the same room or location. VRI is another delivery model for traditional interpreting services covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). With VRI, three possible interpreter locations exist: 1) the interpreter can be at a location remote to both the Deaf and hearing individuals (but the individuals are at the same site); 2) the interpreter is physically located with the Deaf consumer and the hearing person is remote; or 3) the interpreter is physically located with the hearing person and the Deaf consumer is remote. VRI services are arranged by an individual contacting a VRI provider and requesting an interpreter. The same type of equipment and connectivity requirements are used for VRI as for VRS. The advantage of most VRI providers is that they have interpreters working 24 hours a day, so there is no wait for services. Other VRI

providers require that the interpreter request be made in advance in order to ensure availability of the interpreter. Most VRI providers charge a per-minute or per-hour user fee to the person or business arranging the session.

Video Interpreting: This is the term used for any form of remote interpreting involving the use of video technology. This can include VRS or VRI.

Technology Basics

Although the computer and a webcam can be used to deliver video interpreting, there is a growing trend to use both videophones and televisions for the same purpose. Currently the most popular videophone is the D-link, which retails at about $200 (Oct 2005). In those cases, the TV and the videophone replace the computer and its peripherals but require the same broadband (high speed) cable or DSL line. Many of the VRS service providers give videophones to deaf consumers at no charge.

There is also a new "stand-alone" videophone on the market called the Motorola"OJO." No TV monitor is required for this product, as the screen is built into the unit. It is portable and requires less bandwidth than the videophone and the webcam computer setup. The OJO videophone currently sells for about $700 (Oct 2005).

Editor's Note: An Equipment Comparison is included in the complete White Paper.

VRS/VRI Service Providers

Currently, there are several national providers of video relay services (VRS). The FCC maintains a list of providers at http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/trs_providers.html.

A few are listed below:

- AT&T (www.attvrs.com)
- CSDVRS (www.csdvrs.com)
- Hamilton (www.hamiltonrelay.com)
- Hands On Video Relay (www.hovrs.com)
- IP Relay VRS (www.ip-vrs.com/index.html)
- Sorenson (www.sorensonvrs.com)
- Sprint (www.sprintvrs.com)

Some of the national providers of video remote interpreting services (VRI) are:

- Communication Access Center (www.cacdhh.org)
- Communication Access Network (www.caninterpreters.com/vri/)
- Hands On (www.handsonsvs.com)
- Interpreters, Inc. (www.interpretersinc.com)
- Sign Language Associates (www.signlanguage.com/clients/video.php)
- Sign On (www.signonasl.com/video.htm)
- Sorenson (www.sorensonvri.com)

Costs

Although VRS service is currently free to consumers, there are huge variations in costs of telephone connections, cable lines, computers and their peripherals. It is impossible to provide an exact cost of the set-up of the hardware and software needed for Video Interpreting capabilities. The cost of the VRI service varies and is charged on a per minute or a per hour rate.

Editor's Note: A list of state projects and programs around the country is included in the full White Paper.

Technical Problems

Video interpreting demands that a large amount of data be transmitted in a short period of time. As such, the recommended amount of bandwidth is 384kbps. The primary consideration for any video interpreted session is how many frames per second are being transmitted. Good quality requires a minimum of 30 frames per second. Without high speed bandwidth, the signed communication, and potentially the spoken communication, will lag, causing choppy signs and/or irregular pauses in communication.

Dedicated ISDN, Cable or T1 lines provide a clearer picture, as it will not be subject to the amount of traffic on the lines being shared by other systems.

Information technology (IT) presents its own set of security concerns. As such, most businesses and agencies maintain firewalls that limit what type of telecommunications interactions can occur within their closed networks. Often, the ports which allow video interpreting to occur are not opened within these networks, thus preventing access to the service. Users of video interpreting have to request that the ports be opened and remain open. Thus it is wise to build strong working relationships with the IT staff members who oversee firewall policy and maintenance and to educate them on the need and advantages of this technology for Deaf consumers.

Addressing Confidentiality and Privacy

The FCC issued a public notice clarifying that doctors, counselors and other professionals could communicate with patients through videoconferencing and relay services without violating the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). HIPAA was instituted to protect patient and consumer privacy. Counselors, consumers, and interpreters need to realize that the two most common standards of connectivity (H.320 and H.323*) are not considered secure by default. Organizations and companies that offer video based communication for Deaf consumers are required to maintain appropriate technical and physical security measures to ensure confidentiality of the information and material transmitted.

* Information on H.320 is included in the complete White Paper.

Environmental Concerns

When preparing offices, conference rooms, or other workspaces for video interpreting, there are specific environmental and/or physical concerns that have to be addressed. Quality lighting and acoustics are the foundation of a successful video interpreting session. Without proper lighting and sound, difficulty in signing, hearing, speaking, and responding will arise, leading to user frustration and possible miscommunication. Thus, as discussed above, the need for microphones and cameras that can carry the capability of the technology are musts.

Another consideration is the visual "noise." Open windows; calendars, pictures, and other wall hangings; desk items such as books and binders; and any background movement can distract the users and disrupt the communication flow. Higher-end cameras will have controls, such as zoom, that can be used to adjust the images to reduce or eliminate some of these visual "noises." Just as visual"noise" can be distracting for all users; auditory noise can be distracting for hearing users.

Other physical consideration when planning for video interpreting are color and lighting. Colors that contrast with

skin tone tend to offer the best backdrop for signing, and lighting should be arranged to illuminate the participants' hands and faces. However, the traditional black clothing for Caucasian interpreters and white clothing for African American interpreters are often not the best colors for VRS and VRI.

Fatigue: Studies have shown that, when compared to face-to-face interpreting, video interpreters experience a decline in performance after 15-18 minutes as opposed to the decline after 30 minutes for in-person interpreting. (Moser-Mercer May, 2003) Remote interpreters should have shorter time periods of interpreting with more frequent breaks.

Implications for Vocational Rehabilitation

As video based technologies and services grow and are more commonly understood by practitioners and consumers, the request for these services will grow. Just as "PC" (personal computer) entered our daily jargon 15 years ago and "IM" (instant messaging) entered it 5 years ago, so, too, will VRS and VRI become daily abbreviations we use without giving them a second thought. Anticipating this growth, vocational rehabilitation providers need to consider how the technology will impact the way in which services are delivered via long-distance, e.g., video-based communication.

For example, the Kentucky Deaf Access Consortium's research found that eight (8) staff interpreters who work for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) traveled 41,878 miles between October 1, 2004, and December 31, 2004, for a travel cost of $17,728. Looking at the purposes for the travel, researchers see that it was primarily for the provision of interpreting services to RCDs (Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf) and Deaf consumers. Providing the interpreters with video interpreting capabilities at their home OVR site could eliminate much of that travel.

The savings realized through decreased travel makes video interpreting appealing to many, especially those on whose shoulders falls the decision to allocate resource dollars. However, it should be noted that the most sensitive of topics are still best addressed in face-to-face meetings; these would include courtroom cases, certain medical situations, psychological evaluations and certain educational situations.

> "For people without disabilities, technology makes things convenient, whereas for people with disabilities, it makes things possible"
>
> -Judy Heumann

That being said, what are appropriate uses of this technology for vocational rehabilitation (VR) settings? In Kentucky and Utah, the RCDs and other internal staff are already using the system as a tool for daily communication and for trainings and meetings. Both states have also used the system on a more limited basis to provide mental health counseling and VR counseling. During these sessions, other applications, such as chat, multi-conferencing, and filesharing, could easily be added.

Thus, perhaps the best way to define and summarize potential uses is immediate communication, collaboration and coordination. For example, as a thoroughfare to immediate communication, video communication technology allows for instant one-on-one communication between an RCD and a Deaf consumer. The RCD can provide information or recommendations in the native signed language without any wait. This is especially true in the more rural areas where RCDs often have large service territories; in such situations, the technology means the Deaf consumer can have more frequent and effective contact without having to wait on the RCD to travel. Collaboration and coordination allow for training, perhaps of a new RCD who needs to quickly familiarize herself with fellow staff, agency protocol, required tasks, etc. In short, video based communication can provide a timelier, cost-effective response, especially for those staff and consumers in rural locales where the availability of interpreters is most limited.

The former Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services for the U.S. Department of Education, Judy Heumann, said, "For people without disabilities, technology makes things convenient, whereas for people with disabilities, it makes things possible" (2000). Video based communication holds great possibilities for provision of service to the Deaf in the face of critical interpreter shortages, especially in the most isolated areas.

Editor's Note: The original document contains a list of Questions for Vendors.

Conclusion

No doubt, video relay services and video remote interpreting services are spreading quickly across the nation. Signing Deaf consumers have easy access to communication in

a way now that has never before been available. These services are definitely changing the way we all think in terms of accessibility to communication with this population. Historically, many areas of the country have experienced a shortage of qualified sign language interpreters. Video relay call centers are now opening at a rapid rate in many states. As these centers open and interpreters are hired by the VRS providers, the shortage of available interpreters for on-site community and educational requests are even more dramatic. Many areas are experiencing a critical shortage of qualified sign language interpreters to provide face-to-face service for vocational rehabilitation clients and staff. One solution appears to be to encourage more and more individuals to pursue training and consider interpreting as a career. This is not a "quick fix" but will allow for a way to assist in meeting future demands. Sadly, federal funds for interpreter training programs are being drastically cut at a time when the demands are the greatest for qualified sign language interpreters. It is crucial that agencies investigate ways to fund more training programs so that there will be qualified interpreters in the field to meet both the community and VRS/VRI needs.

Title IV of the 1990 ADA was designed by Congress to provide Deaf and hard of hearing persons with access to the telephone system. At that time, telephone lines were configured as "pots" (plain old telephone service lines), and the technologies of the Internet, wireless environments, and video interpreting were not even on the telecommunications horizon. A closer look at Title IV identifies the key concept of "functionally equivalent," meaning, in this case, that the service or device responsible for the telecommunication access must be as functionally accessible and equivalent as it is to a hearing person. Applied to video based communication, this concept requires that agencies and service providers research and provide service delivery mechanisms that are the timeliest, the most cost-effective, and the most deaf-friendly. Video interpreting should now be considered as the mechanism that can and will provide a larger and more effective array of services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers, while quite possibly saving money. Thus, vocational rehabilitation agencies should consider purchase and use of this technology.
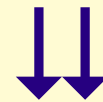
For more information:

Rebecca Sills: Rebecca.Sills@dol.state.ga.us
Patty Conway: PattyC.Conway@ky.gov
Video Interpreting Committee, Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf: www.rid.org/VideoInterpretingTalkingPoints.pdf

Attention postsecondary disability service providers,
interpreters, vocational rehab counselors,
and related professionals:
You are invited to...

Postsecondary
Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing Services
Regional Roundtable

Wednesday, March 8, 2006
9^{00}AM - 3^{30} PM
Mott Community College
Flint Michigan
Genesee Room, Prahl Building
http://www.mcc.edu/maps/3d_main.shtml
(Lunch on your own)

Presenters:
Cassie Manuel
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee
Deaf/Hard of Hearing Program Student Advisor
Midwest Center for Postsecondary Outreach (MCPO) Specialist

Bambi Riehl
University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee
PantherCom Project Director
Midwest Center for Postsecondary Outreach (MCPO) Specialist

Sponsored by
- Midwest Center for Postsecondary Outreach/PEPNet - through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education
- Mott Community Colleges, Learning Center, DisAbility Services
- University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Deaf/Hard of Hearing Program

Questions????
Call: Bambi Riehl
414-229-2343

Note: There is no registration fee for this workshop but
please pre-register by completing the registration and

REGISTRATION FORM

___ Yes, I would like to attend
___ No, I can't attend, but please send me MCPO literature about D/HH postsecondary services
___ No, I can't attend, but my institution currently provides service to students who are deaf/hard of hearing and could benefit from a personal contact with MCPO outreach staff.

Name _____
Title   _____
Campus/Agency _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____ Email _____

**I am requesting the following accommodations: _____

Please return by <u>February 13, 2006</u> via fax @ 414-229-6820 or mail to:
Bambi Riehl, PO Box 413, Student Accessibility Center
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI 53201

*** NO REGISTRATION FEE REQUIRED. LUNCH ON YOUR OWN ***

We would appreciate your answering a few questions to assist us in assessing discussion topics for this roundtable workshop: **These questions pertain to postsecondary services for students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing (D/HH)**	**1 = low interest** **2 = medium** **3 = high** **My interest in this topic:**	**1 = limited** **2 = some** **3 = much experience** **My experience with this topic:**
Staff Interpreters, hiring, developing policies		
Freelance/hourly interpreters, hiring, developing policies		
Assessing appropriate accommodations		
Captioned movies/TV		
Captioning: discussion of C-Print® and/or Real Time captioning		
Exam accommodations		
Understanding language issues of Deaf students		
Getting the most from assistive listening devices		
Other areas of interest?		
At your campus… currently: # Deaf students: # hard of hearing: … on average: # Deaf students: # hard of hearing:		